

The “Bottom Line” about Bottom

Among all of the characters that Shakespeare ever developed, Nick Bottom is, undoubtedly, one of the most entertaining. His whimsical and charismatic personality instantaneously endears him to the reader as well as the other characters in Shakespeare’s play.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, our first impression of Bottom is established in the scene in which he and his middle class cohorts, led by Peter Quince, are attempting to develop a play to perform at Duke Theseus’s wedding (the reward for the best play being a large sum of prize money, they were especially motivated). Immediately, we are able to gather that Bottom has not only a dominant personality but also a passion for drama as he and Quince have a few brief squabbles over the casting of the parts: Bottom not only wants a large part – he wants **all** of the large parts! As vivacious and humorous as Bottom comes across, to the reader and also his friends, we also sense that he is both overconfident and obnoxious at times.

Bottom unwittingly plays an important part in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as it was he that “directed” his friends that the next practice would be held in the forest where the main part of the story unfolds.

It is here we see another key role that Bottom plays, albeit figuratively: while *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is very much a play focusing on fantasy, Bottom’s character contrasts that very idea; he is uncommonly simple, unimaginative, and

literal-minded. Our first example of this is demonstrated at the second practice. Bottom felt it necessary that a prologue be composed for the audience which explaining that certain elements of the play (where characters kill themselves and a lion comes out on stage) are nothing more than the actors playing their parts. Since Bottom sees everything as it is, he doesn't believe that the audience of their play would know better than to take such elements seriously.

Another piece of the story that gives Bottom more dimension is the uncanny relationship he forms with Titania, the Faerie Queen. While Bottom waits out of sight from his friends for his cue during practice, Puck, King Oberon's fairy minion, turns Bottom's head into that of a donkey's as a practical joke. Bottom, not noticing the transformation, comes in on his cue. Seeing him with the head of a donkey, Bottom's friends run away in fear! Since Bottom doesn't realize what has happened to him, he thinks they were simply playing a joke on him and remains in the forest. Titania, while under a spell also, "falls deeply in love" with Bottom (only because he is "the first creature she sees" after waking). Again we see an antipode in the personality of Bottom: he bears both the elements of absolute hilarity and complete sobriety with respect to life. When Titania expresses her "feelings" for Bottom, it is ironic that he isn't surprised. And yet, he bluntly states that what she is saying about him isn't true. "Reason and love keep little company together now-a-days," he says. Although Bottom says this in response to his personal situation, he is actually summarizing the thought that is alluded to throughout the play: is love based upon reason or fantasy? Bottom further proves his simple-minded ways when Titania offers to prove her love to

him by granting him any desire he may have. But what does Bottom request? Nothing more than that someone would scratch his head, bring him food, and play some pleasant music.

While Bottom is sleeping, the spell on Titania is lifted and she sees him (with his donkey head) as a disgusting creature and no longer “loves” him. Later, when Bottom awakes all alone, he thinks that the time he spent with Titania was nothing but a dream and comments that it would probably make a good ballad. Interestingly enough, we see him contrast himself once more: Bottom, who beforehand was never without words, is rendered speechless when he has the opportunity to tell Peter Quince about his “dream.”

Overall, we see Bottom as the character that brings unending laughter while also bringing *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* fantastic concepts back down to earth. Although he often saw everything in black and white, Bottom's colorful temperament makes him one of the most loved and enjoyed of Shakespeare's characters.